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ABSTRACT

There is an urgent need for young people to learn to know the natural world of which they are a part. Outdoor education is the only means by which people can recover their stone-age identity and discover that they are wildlife, no different in the basics of life than any other species. For most of their story, human beings lived in harmony with the world. Only recently has the combination of numbers and undisciplined greed led humankind to alienation and departure from the natural way. Outdoor education programs that undertake to bring alienated youth back into touch with their own wild natures share four major features: (1) earthlinks, the complete technology of daily living (program components, such as working with food from scratch, that provide intimate links with the environment); (2) stories (myths or science that describe and explain the world); (3) wonder (realization of being alive and related to the environment); and (4) personal identification (expanding sense of self beyond the limits of one's skin). It is essential that all four elements be present. Earthlinks alone makes exploiters. Science alone makes smarter polluters. Wonder alone makes helpless mystics. Personal identification is impossible without the other elements. Why disturb the world outside? Because the world outside is the same as the world inside and you are it. Going away from cities and towns is the only way to find this out. (SV)

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WHY DISTURB THE WORLD OUTSIDE?

Bert Horwood

The cartoon character, Sally Brown, reluctantly bouncing on a bus to school camp, cries out "Why disturb the world outside?" It's a good question and one which the cartoon strip never answers. There are many possible answers and most outdoor educators are practised at supplying them to suit the circumstances. In this article, I will develop an uncommon answer based on the urgent need for young human beings to experience the wild.

Sally Brown's experience has led her to believe that there are two worlds: one inside and one outside. She doesn't know where her food, shelter, water and air come from. Her previous experiences on field trips and school outings have not educated her to know that the outside-inside distinction is an illusion. She has not been educated deeply to know that acts of life always disturb the world. But her experiences have taught her something which she holds deeply: an aversion to outdoor nature. If Sally Brown was born "a stone age baby," as R.D. Laing claims, then she has already been transformed into a 20th Century alien. To be fully human, and in tune with her world, she must be transformed again.

The thousands of Sally Browns in our schools are what outdoor education is about. There is an urgent need for them to learn to know, love, cherish and obey the natural world of which they are, willy nilly, a part. Education, here, is more than knowing "about." It includes the intellectual aspects of learning (knowing), the emotional aspects of learning (loving), and the actions resulting from complete education (cherishing and obeying).

Outdoor education is the only means by which people can recover their stone age identity; it is the only way by which people can discover that they are wild life, no different in the basics of life from wombats and gum trees. Indoor education can not possibly touch this central part of being human.

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What does it mean to be wild? English speakers use the word "wild" in various ways. Wild has suggestions of lawlessness ("She's a wild one, she is.") and of freedom from constraint and responsibility ("The call of the wild"). Wild also carries a negative meaning; the lack of order, domestication and civilization, ("The rain forest is a wild tangle of vegetation.") But wild animals and plants are not lawless; they obey natural laws which we can grasp dimly in the study of natural science, particularly ecology. Wild plants and animals are not free of the controls and constraints which make the biosphere work. Animals are not free from predators, plants are not free from fire and flood, all obey the laws of life and death, eat and be eaten.

In terms of human beings, the earliest records and stories show that our distant wild ancestors were subject to stringent natural and cultural laws. The modern Western interpretation of "wild" as "lawless" is based on false belief that the further one lived from nature the more superior one was. It was, and still is, a virtue to be a city person (from Latin, "civilized"), to be alienated from one's wild nature. That is Sally Brown's state.

I think that wild means limited freedom, the freedom to be true to yourself. A wild apple tree is free to be the quintessential apple tree, gnarled, twisted, unpruned. A wild gorilla acts out the true nature of gorillas. This contrasts with the gorilla in a zoo which is not free to be fully gorilla, being forced by fences and artificial environment to depend on others to supply food, shelter and society.

There are disadvantages to being wild. Life can be short and tragic for wild things. To be fully an apple tree, or fully a gorilla brings with it risks and uncertainties. The same is true for humans who get in touch with their intrinsic wildness. Yet, because wildness acknowledges the way the world actually works, being wild leads to living, and dieing, in harmony with the natural way. The natural way is what Warwick Fox calls "The Way of Earthly Wisdom," the only way that the

biosphere can operate to sustain itself and renew itself for thousands and thousands of years.

That's all very well for apples and gorillas, but where do humans fit in? It is a mistake to deny our animal nature and our position on the earth as one of millions of wild species. We humans have the same heads, hands and hearts as our original ancient ancestors. We emerged as a part of the world and for most of our story, we lived in long-term harmony with it. It is only recently that the combination of numbers and undisciplined greed have led us to alienation and departure from the natural way. The important point is that laughter, artistry, loving ... all the happy aspects of being human were known to our early ancestors and are fully compatible with rediscovery of our wild state.

When humans learn (or relearn) how to be wild, we learn how to become fully human within the framework of the laws of nature and within the limits of our humanity. We find out who we are, in a profound way; we develop supportable, sustainable beliefs about how we came to be here; we find out what our path in life is in harmony with the rest of nature. This should be seen as a step forward, not a regression into a dark and dirty past. Outdoor education is the only part of the education systems that has potential to teach large numbers of young folk these critical lessons.

What do outdoor education programmes look like when they undertake to bring alienated youth into touch with their own wild natures? There are four major features of such programmes: I call them earthlinks, stories, wonder, and personal identification. Each will be considered briefly.

Earthlinks are programme components that drive students to experience direct, intimate links with their surroundings. Many students think that food originates in cans and packets. Earthlink components have students work with their own food from the earliest possible link in the chain. They dig their own potatoes,

pick their own fruit, bake their own bread, even kill their own meat. How can anyone understand the nature of their own life if they do not understand and honour the blood that is shed for a meal? As Gary Snider says, "First you pray to it, then you kill it, then you eat it." At an easier level, students (at the least) know that what we call "ham" is salted and smoked pig muscle, and know and appreciate the labour involved in preparing their own food.

Food and feeding is only one example of earthlinks possible to explore in outdoor education. The source of water, and the energy needed to move it from place to place, can be directly experienced by children. But full appreciation of our linkages with water would require that students also experience where the used water goes. It is trivial to merely state that every thing is connected to everything else, but to live the reality of the connections gives an entirely different order of understanding.

In general earthlinks are present in a programme whenever students experience directly the fullest possible answer to the questions "Where does it come from? Where does it go to?" Earthlinks are the complete technology of the daily business of living.

Stories are the descriptions and explanations we give of the world around us. They are always based on observation, the more acute the better. Nowadays, we call the ancient stories myths. Our modern stories we call science. I lump them together because, whether ancient or modern, stories give us our images of the world and our place in it. Science, when experienced as story emerging imaginatively out of painstaking observation, provides powerful evidence of our harmonious place in nature and of our kinship with the other living things. In this context, science in the outdoor education curriculum is not a way of detaching ourselves from the world, but rather is an important way to connect more deeply.

In general, stories are present in a programme when the work of observation

and explanation is set in a story context about the way the world is and about our place within it. Alternative stories are often told and always respected.

Wonder is a subtle programme element which is difficult to achieve and sometimes even more difficult to justify to hard-nosed authorities. Wonder is closely related to what Steve van Matre calls "magic" in Earth Education materials. It refers to that feeling of marvel, even awe, which every person experiences when they encounter the surprise and delight of life beyond themselves. Charity James, a little-known English educator, calls this appreciative and non-exploitive encounter with things "dialogue." Silence and solitude are essential for wonder to be present in outdoor education. Dialogue with tree ferns calls for freedom from all distractions. Students spend time alone surrounded by the natural wild. The duration and frequency of the experience is adjusted to the age and readiness of the children.

In general, wonder is present in programmes when students feel a kind of gentle astonishment at being alive and at feeling related to their environment. Wonder always takes time to achieve.

Personal identification flows from the previous three elements. It refers to expanding your sense of self beyond the limits of your skin. Personal identification means that a person recognizes that nearby parts of the world, previously perceived as "outside" are in fact a part of one's self. Personal identification is more a journey than a destination. It is enough that students begin to have such perceptions in a small way, know how to continue their practise and have the will to do so. It is impossible for a person who is developing personal identification to be alienated. When Sally Brown begins this process, she will become eager to be outdoors.

It is essential that all four elements be present in outdoor education. One, or other alone only worsens the alienation. Earthlinks alone makes exploiters, hit and grab artists. Science alone makes smarter and smarter polluters. Wonder alone make helpless mystics who gaze at their navels while the living world whimpers into

destruction around them. Personal identification is impossible without support from the other elements.

Why disturb the world outside? Because the world outside is the same as the world inside and you are it. Going away from cities and towns is the only way to find this out.

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Bert Horwood is a Canadian outdoor educator who has just finished a 6 month visit in Victoria. He has recently retired from Queen's University, in Kingston, Ontario, Canada and continues to be active as an independent outdoor educator.